

ACCESS



AMERICA

American, African, Muslim

Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison becomes the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Congress



On January 4, 2007, Keith Ellison was sworn in as U.S. Representative serving the 5th District of Minnesota, making him the first Muslim to serve in the U.S. Congress. (© AP Image)

Democrat Keith Ellison won a closely watched Minnesota congressional race last November making him the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Congress. He is also the first black congressman elected from Minnesota.

Ellison, a two-term state legislator before his run for

Congress, had opposed the war in Iraq, and had advocated universal health care for Americans.

Even though he is an observant Muslim, Ellison did not make religion a feature of his campaign.

“People draw strength and moral courage from a variety of religious traditions. Mine have come from both Catholicism and Islam. I was raised Catholic and later became a Muslim while attending Wayne State University. I am inspired by the Quran’s message of an encompassing

“I am inspired by the Quran’s message of an encompassing divine love, and a deep faith guides my life everyday.”

divine love, and a deep faith guides my life everyday,” he wrote in an

article for the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

“I think it’s time for the United States to see a moderate Muslim voice, to see a face of Islam that is just like everybody else’s face,” he also said.

Born in Detroit, Ellison received his law degree at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where he practices law and where he lived for the past 17 years. He converted to Islam at the age of 19, saying that as a young man he was outraged

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From the Director

History, as it is written and conceptualized in any given society, indicates what we hold as true and relevant. The history of the United States is no different – it is the story of the struggle to uphold and implement the principles of freedom, equality and justice for all. No experience or community illustrates this struggle more fully than that of African-Americans. Congressman Keith Ellison, a Muslim African-American, exemplifies how far we have come in making reality of those principles.

This month, we celebrate “Black History Month,” originally established as “Negro History Week” in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a noted African-American author and scholar. This event evolved into “Black” or “African-American” History Month in 1976. The theme of this year’s celebration is “From Slavery to Freedom: The Story of Africans in the Americas.” Please take time this month to learn more about the history of our struggle to uphold the core principles of democracy.

—Patricia Kabra





IRC Tips

IRC Director Khaled Ben Bhouzid and his team suggest these online African-American history resources, not to mention the many relevant books in the IRC collection.

[African-American Women On-line Archival Collections](#)

[American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology](#)

[Been Here So Long: Selections from the WPA American Slave Narratives](#)

[Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938](#)

[Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery](#)

[Chronology on the History of Slavery and Racism](#)

[The History of Jim Crow](#)

[Slave Movement During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries](#)

[The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois; 1903](#)

These are clickable links in the electronic version of this newsletter. If you are reading this on paper, then search for these exact titles in a search engine such as Google.

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by racism and injustice.

Ellison describes himself at that age as an angry young social activist, but "I eventually realized that it is easy to be a critic pointing out problems and failings, but it is a far more difficult thing to be part of creating the solution." He credits his family for steering him onto the right path.

"I began to help create a world where everybody counts and where there are no throwaway people," he

said.

Ellison was sworn in on January 4, 2007, swearing his oath of office on a copy of the Quran that belonged to the author of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson.

Adapted from a November 9, 2006 article by Staff Writer Lea Terhune for The Washington File, a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>.

DVC Series Kicks Off with Civil Rights Movement

On January 26, Professor Robert J. Cottrol kicked off our "Digital Video Conference for Learning" programs presenting the topic "Legal Accomplishments of Civil Rights Movement Leaders." Professor Cottrol, a professor of law, history and sociology at The George Washington University Law School, engaged a group of 25 students and professors of English, lawyers and an American researcher. Questions were quite diverse, from whether or not the U.S. legal system was still entertaining civil rights lawsuits to questions about the controversy over affirmative action, to the future of civil rights issues as Hispanics become the largest minority population in the U.S.

In celebration of Black History Month, the American Center is pleased to announce that Sheldon Austin will be the featured speaker for our next DVC to discuss the book "I have a Dream," a collection of inspiring words from Martin Luther King. The DVC will take place at the U.S. embassy on Wednesday, February 28 at 3:00 p.m.

We invite faculty, students, academic institutions and other interested parties to send ideas for DVCs to be hosted on the premises of the U.S. Embassy. While most DVCs are limited to one hour, the debate among the group can continue afterwards, including via web chats, blogs and a sustained networking effort. Let's continue to learn and share!

To participate in this program and for more information, or to suggest another possible program, please contact English Teaching Program Assistant Sami Saaied at 71-107-259 or saaieds@state.gov.

VISIT ALUMNI.STATE.GOV!

The global web-based community by and for alumni of U.S. Government exchange programs



Alumni Spotlight

Name: Khaoula Touati

Program: Partnerships for Learning Undergraduate Studies (PLUS) 2004 – 2006

Home in Tunisia: Tunis

U.S. exchange location.: Omaha, Nebraska

Fondest memory of the U.S.: One of my best memories was during my work in the TV station, when the TV crew and the producer chose me to present the news in a live newscast. That day I cried because I had the chance to fulfill my dream to be an anchor.

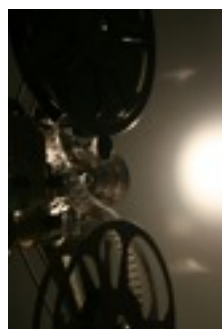
Most important lesson learned: Responding to a moment of obligation means applying your beliefs, skills, and experiences to build a better world.

Advice for other potential participants: My advice for student who are thinking about going on the PLUS Program or other exchange programs is just, "Go for it!" It will be the experience of your life. You will have the opportunity to have a better education that can allow you to see things more clearly than ever before; consequently you will have a better understanding of the world.

My U.S. experience: I went to the United States in March 2004 to start a pre-academic program at Denver University, then transferred to the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) where I spent two full years until May 2006 when I get my Bachelor's degree in broadcast journalism. I had my first internship at the UNO TV, a local educational TV station in Omaha, and it was the most interesting job experience I have ever had. The TV crew I worked with was very helpful and together we shot football, volleyball, hockey and also wrestling competitions on campus and other different programs. I did live interviews and four news stories broadcast on TV. As an international student I tried to choose stories that reflect my cultural and religious background, so I worked on the nature of relationships between Muslim and Americans students on campus and how they can benefit from learning from each other.

At UNO I lived in the residence halls on campus with three American roommates with whom I shared very good time. UNO is a public university with a large number of international students. On campus I was active in the Muslim Student Association, the Hand of Hope Organization, The National Broadcasting Society, and Not All Muslims are Terrorists. I also did some volunteer work like painting and cleaning, not to forget belly dancing at the international banquet on campus, hiking in the Rocky Mountains, ice skiing, and dancing salsa. Being part of those organizations helped me to better integrate in and learn more about American society.

My experience in the United States has such a tremendous impact on my life because I have learned a lot from it. I have learned about Americans and other Arabs and Muslims and also about myself. Through sessions organized by the PLUS program in Washington, I learned how to be leader; thus, I have learned to believe in myself, think big and look for a better future not only for me but for Tunisians, Muslims and the whole world.



Film Series at the American Corner

Friday, February 23, 2007 at 2:30 PM at the American Corner

This month we are pleased to present Steven Spielberg's "The Color Purple" (1985) starring Whoopi Goldberg, based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning Alice Walker novel. Moving, sometimes disturbing, this film was nominated for 11 Academy Awards and was described by renowned Chicago Sun-Times film critic Roger Ebert as "so joyous that this is one of the few movies in a long time that inspires tears of happiness, and earns them."

American Corner at AMIDEAST, 22, rue Al Amine Al Abassi, Cité des Jardin, 1002 TUNIS-BELVÉDÈRE

Fulbright Opportunity

The Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence Program is seeking a professor of Arabic language and Arabic literature in translation for a 2007-2008 academic year placement at Norfolk State University in Norfolk, Virginia. Candidates must be able to lecture fluently in English, and preference is given to individuals with a doctoral degree in their field who have not previously been Fulbright grantees. Applications must be received by 15 February 2007.

For more information, please contact Fouzia Ben Kheder, Cultural Affairs Specialist for Exchanges, at 71-107-438 or benkhederf@state.gov.

February Events

14 Wednesday 6:30 PM

U.S. Embassy (Information Resource Center)

IRC Director Khaled Ben Bhouzid shares online resources on African-American studies. This session will be given again on **Wednesday, February 21** at 6:30 PM at the American Corner.

16 Friday 6:30 PM

American Corner

Photo exhibition by IVLP alumnus Nader Ayadi, "The USA as seen by a Tunisian student from the University of Jendouba," continues all month.

23 Friday 2:30 PM

American Corner

Screening of the film "The Color Purple" (1985) followed by discussion in English led by Margaret Gleason. Open to the public. *See page 2!*

28 Wednesday 3:00 PM

U.S. Embassy (Multipurpose Room)

DVC with retired U.S. diplomat Sheldon Austin discussing the book *I Have a Dream* on the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. RSVP required, Sami Saaied, 71-107-259 or saaieds@state.gov.

All month

Fridays 3:30-3:30 PM (except 2/23, see above)

American Corner

Free English Fridays! Come chat with a native speaker of English.

American Corner at AMIDEAST

22, rue Al Amine Al Abassi, Cité des Jardins, 1002 TUNIS-BELVÉDÈRE



The American Center

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